THE Kirtland CONNECTION

A Quarterly Newsletter for Kirtland Local Schools | *Spring 2026*

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Hello Kirtland Local Schools' Community,

As we transition from winter to spring, I am thrilled that this edition of the *Kirtland Connection* highlights so many positives taking place within our district. I have always maintained that we are exceptionally fortunate to have such unwavering support from our community and stakeholders. This was on full display when the Kirtland PTA, Kirtland Public Library, Kirtland Police Department, and our school district partnered for a community read of "The Anxious Generation". Seeing more than 150 community members come together to learn how we can better support our children was truly inspiring.

Our students and staff continue to thrive throughout the district. Congratulations to our High School (FTC) and Middle School (FLL) robotics teams for qualifying for State! Beyond their technical skills, these students are leaders who consistently give back to their peers and community. Kudos to our Academic Challenge Team for their recent victory. Additionally, for the first time ever, Kirtland High School earned a Gold Rating on the AP School Honor Roll. Kirtland Elementary has earned its seventh consecutive Gold Rating for PBIS! Our students have raised thousands of dollars for the American Heart Association, Birthright, and the Kirtland Area Service Council, while also supporting local food pantries and Toys for Tots.

I would like to cordially invite our local seniors to our annual Senior Citizen Appreciation Night on April 16. You can find more details on page 6. I truly hope to see you there!

Finally, as we look to next school year, kindergarten registration is officially open. Families can find all the necessary information and registration links on our website.

Thank you for your continued partnership and support.

Dr. Chad VanArnhem, Superintendent

COMMUNITY BOOK READ ON STUDENT WELL-BEING UNITES KIRTLAND FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

Kirtland Local Schools brought families and community members together for a powerful Community Book Read centered on student well-being, youth mental health, and the impact of technology on today's children.

On February 2, more than 150 adults filled Hornet Hall at Kirtland Elementary School for a Community Read discussion of "The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness" by Jonathan Haidt. The initiative, supported through a strong partnership among the Kirtland PTA, Kirtland Police Department, Kirtland Public Library, and Kirtland Local Schools, encouraged parents, guardians, grandparents, and community members to engage in a shared learning experience focused on supporting students' social, emotional, and mental health.

The evening discussion was moderated by Dr. Kelly Moran and featured a diverse panel of local experts who shared both professional insights and personal perspectives on the topics explored in the book. Panelists included Sergeant Zach Petric from the Kirtland Police Department, Magistrate Holly Welsh, pediatrician Dr. Diane Lester, and Kirtland High School guidance counselor Kara Prosuch.

Throughout the evening, panelists and attendees explored a wide range of topics, including the connection between technology and rising anxiety levels, the risks associated with social media, the importance of free play, and practical safety and prevention strategies families can use at home. Audience members were also able to submit questions, creating an engaging and interactive dialogue.

The event reflected a true community collaboration. The Kirtland Public Library provided numerous copies of the book for families, while the Kirtland PTA supported the

(continued on page 2)

TREASURER'S UPDATE

The Kirtland Board of Education approved the District's updated Five-Year Financial Forecast on February 23, 2026. The forecast indicates that the District remains financially stable in the near term, with projected cash balances expected to continue meeting the District's financial obligations.

Kirtland Local Schools has not needed to pass new general fund operating money since 2012. This has been made possible through careful financial planning and ongoing monitoring of the District's finances through monthly finance meetings. The District also works to control costs by sharing services in areas such as food service, treasurer services, human resources, payroll, and bus maintenance. In addition, the District has successfully secured numerous grants and more than $300,000 in sponsorship support to help support programs and offset expenses.

Looking ahead, the forecast also highlights some financial challenges that many Ohio school districts are experiencing. Recent changes to Ohio property tax laws (HB 129, HB 186, and related legislation) have reduced projected revenue growth, resulting in an estimated $4.5 million reduction in expected revenue over the next several years compared to previous projections.

At the same time, operating costs continue to rise, particularly in areas such as employee benefits, insurance, and general operational costs that have been affected by inflation.

Because of these factors, the forecast shows the District may begin deficit spending next year, meaning annual expenses could exceed annual revenues if no adjustments are made.

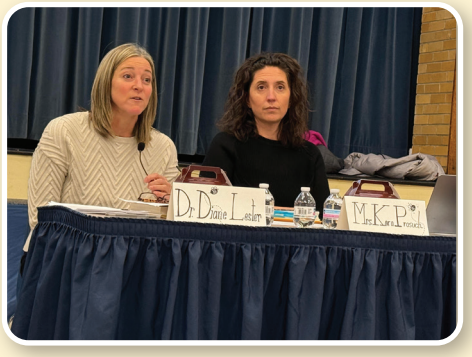
The Board of Education and District leadership will continue to carefully monitor financial trends and plan for the future. Thoughtful financial planning and potential levy discussions in the future will help ensure the District remains financially strong and continues providing high-quality educational opportunities for Kirtland students.

COMMUNITY BOOK READ ON STUDENT WELL-BEING UNITES KIRTLAND FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

initiative by purchasing books, securing educational student videos, and bringing Jungle Terry to entertain children during the presentation. Additional support was provided by the Kirtland Police Department and Kirtland Local Schools.

Superintendent Chad VanArnhem emphasized the importance of the initiative and the strong community engagement it inspired.

"This event signifies what makes Kirtland Local Schools so unique — the incredible community support and involvement that we continue to see," said VanArnhem. "We are beyond grateful to have a panel of experts with such knowledge come together to share their insight. To have more than 150 people show up and have all 50 copies of the book checked out speaks volumes about our parent involvement and support. I am optimistic that many people walked away more knowledgeable and prepared to help support our students and do it together as a community. Screen time and social media dangers will continue to be topics that we work to educate our students and families about."



In conjunction with the adult discussion, students at Kirtland Elementary School (grades 3–5) and Kirtland Middle School participated in viewings of the documentary "Screenagers" during the school day. The videos helped students better understand the "why" behind healthy screen-time boundaries and encouraged thoughtful conversations about responsible technology use.

District leaders shared appreciation for the strong turnout and continued engagement, noting that the Community Book Read strengthened connections among families, schools, and community partners while reinforcing a shared commitment to supporting the well-being of every Kirtland student.

KIRTLAND HIGH SCHOOL EARNS GOLD RECOGNITION ON 2025 AP SCHOOL HONOR ROLL

Kirtland High School has been named a Gold school on the 2025 Advanced Placement® (AP®) School Honor Roll, an honor that recognizes the school's commitment to expanding access to rigorous coursework while ensuring strong student outcomes. This is the third year the Honor Roll has been released, and the district earned Silver recognition the first two years.

The AP School Honor Roll, administered by the College Board, celebrates schools whose AP programs are delivering results for students while broadening participation. Schools earn recognition annually based on three indicators: cultivating a college-going culture, helping students earn college credit, and maximizing college readiness.

For the Class of 2025, Kirtland High School met or exceeded the Gold-level benchmarks in all three categories. Sixty-seven percent of graduating seniors took at least one AP exam, reflecting a strong culture of academic challenge. Additionally, 61% earned a score of 3 or higher on at least one AP exam, qualifying them for potential college credit, and 38% completed five or more AP exams, including at least one taken during their freshman or sophomore year—exceeding Gold criteria and meeting Platinum-level benchmarks in two areas.

In the Class of 2025, there were 12 AP Scholars, 4 AP Scholars with Honors, and 21 AP Scholars with Distinction. There were 312 AP exams taken over their four years of high school.

"This recognition is a testament to the high expectations we set for our students and the incredible support provided by our educators," said Superintendent Chad VanArnhem. "At Kirtland, we believe every student should have access to challenging, meaningful learning opportunities. Our AP program reflects that belief and prepares students not only for college, but for lifelong success." Kirtland High School offers 13 AP courses.

The College Board notes that students who take AP courses are more likely to attend college, persist through graduation, and feel confident engaging in college-level work. Even for students who do not earn college credit, AP coursework builds critical thinking skills and helps establish a strong college-going culture.

In a congratulatory letter to the school, College Board Senior Vice President Trevor Packer commended Kirtland High School's schoolwide commitment to expanding AP access while maintaining strong performance, noting that such success requires collaboration among teachers, counselors, administrators, students, and families.

The Advanced Placement Program offers college-level coursework in more than 40 subject areas, each culminating in a standardized exam. Students who earn qualifying scores may receive college credit or advanced placement at colleges and universities nationwide.

Kirtland High School's Gold designation places it among a select group of schools nationwide recognized for both academic excellence and equitable access to advanced learning opportunities, reinforcing the district's commitment to preparing all students for future success.

> **"This recognition is a testament to the high expectations we set for our students and the incredible support provided by our educators,"**
>
> — *Chad VanArnhem, Kirtland Local Schools Superintendent*

12	4	21	61%	38%	13
AP SCHOLARS	AP SCHOLARS WITH HONORS	AP SCHOLARS WITH DISTINCTION	EARNED A 3 OR HIGHER ON AT LEAST ONE AP EXAM	COMPLETED FIVE OR MORE AP EXAMS	AP COURSES OFFERED

KIRTLAND ROBOTICS TEAM EARNS SECOND-PLACE INSPIRE AWARD, COMPETES AT STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

The Kirtland Local Schools Electric Hornets robotics team continued its tradition of excellence during the 2025–26 season, earning the second-place Inspire Award at a First Tech Challenge (FTC) qualifier tournament and advancing to the Ohio FTC State Championship for the ninth time.

Our First Lego League (FLL) team named Buzz Buzz Sting Sting won the Innovation Award and advanced to state.

At the qualifier tournament, the Electric Hornets—made up of 10 students in grades 9–12 at Kirtland High School—also competed as part of the winning alliance, successfully navigating a double-elimination format that requires teams to collaborate closely while completing game objectives and scoring points.

The Inspire Award is the highest honor given at FTC competitions and recognizes teams that best exemplify gracious professionalism, technical excellence, and community engagement. Award recipients demonstrate strong robot design and performance while serving as ambassadors for STEM education and the FTC program.

The team's success continued at the FTC State Championship, where the Electric Hornets won their competition and once again earned the second-place Inspire Award, reinforcing their standing as one of Ohio's top FTC programs.

Throughout the season, students designed, built, programmed, and documented their robot to compete in an annually changing FTC game. In the process, team members developed critical skills in engineering, computer science, problem solving, teamwork, and communication.

Beyond competition, the Electric Hornets remain deeply committed to community involvement. The team partners with the Kirtland Police Department to help develop a community app and mentors First Lego League teams at Kirtland and the Willoughby School of Innovation.

"Students are learning communication, time management, problem solving, and collaboration," said coach Donna Rudder. "They're gaining hands-on experience with computer-aided design, 3D printing, and programming, while also developing presentation skills through interactions with other teams and engineering professionals."

The FTC team is coached by Mike and Donna Rudder, Jason Knaus, David and Tabitha Blankenship, and Tim Morris, with assistance from Kirtland High School computer science teacher Heidi Grunenberg.

The Electric Hornets' continued success—including nine state championship appearances—reflects the dedication, commitment, and passion of both students and coaches in building a program that emphasizes innovation, leadership, and service.

KIRTLAND FIRST-GRADERS EXPLORE ANCIENT EGYPT THROUGH CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART VISIT

Kirtland Elementary School first-graders capped off their Knowledge Unit on Ancient Egypt with a memorable visit from the Cleveland Museum of Art's esteemed "Art-to-Go" program.

Students were given the rare opportunity to safely touch authentic, ancient artifacts. Their eyes lit up as they handled real objects from history, including pottery bowls, bead necklaces, and detailed figurines. This direct interaction bridged the gap between textbook lessons and real historical objects, allowing them to feel a genuine connection to the people of Ancient Egypt.

The students also learned that small shabti figurines were placed in tombs, intended to magically spring to life and perform manual labor for the deceased in the afterlife when called upon. Inspired by this concept, these students enthusiastically became artists and historians themselves. They each set out to design and draw their very own unique shabti. This project allowed them to showcase their knowledge, express their imagination, and understand the cultural significance of these fascinating objects.

KIRTLAND HIGH SCHOOL INDUCTS 22 STUDENTS INTO NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY

Twenty-two Kirtland High School students were recognized for their academic excellence, leadership and commitment to service when they were inducted into the school's National Honor Society (NHS) Chapter on December 11 in the Kirtland Elementary School gym.

With chapters in more than 12,500 high schools across the nation, NHS recognizes students who exemplify

four core pillars: Character, Leadership, Service, and Scholarship. Kirtland's 22 new members were selected based on their demonstrated excellence in all four areas.

The 2025 inductees are Julian Aldom, Howard Ayers, Haley Bertovic, Benjamin Brandal, Thomas Caimi, Tage Crisci, Karli DiFranco, Adam Domes, Anna Dumstorff, Ethan Emlaw, Bria Golem, Willa Gordon, Ryan Green, Karen Hill, Magdalen Kothera, Landon Leavelle, Carter Luzar, Danika Schaum, Gianna Trem, Kevin Urbanick, Alexis Vosicky and Noah Zielaskiewicz.

"I am very proud of all of our new NHS inductees," said KHS Principal Mary Pat Pavicic. "More than just good students, upon being selected to serve as members of the National Honor Society, they have exhibited the highest qualities of Character, Leadership, Service, and Scholarship during their years at Kirtland High School. Through all of their hard work, the example they lead, and by exhibiting responsibility, respect, and safety in all they do, they have earned the honor of this distinguished recognition. Thank you to NHS advisors, Mrs. Duncan and Mrs. Crockett, for all of their hard work and efforts in preparation for the ceremony."

As active members of NHS, these students will participate in service projects throughout the school year, mentor younger students and continue to uphold the standards of academic excellence and achievement that earned them this recognition. The inductees join a legacy of Kirtland students who have demonstrated that academic success and service to others go hand-in-hand. The district congratulates all twenty-two NHS inductees on this special achievement.

STUDENTS SHOWCASE TALENT IN ANNUAL SPELLING BEE COMPETITIONS

Five talented Kirtland students took the stage to demonstrate their spelling skills at the annual District Spelling Bee on January 22 in the Forum.

The district's top spellers earned their spots by winning their respective grade-level competitions. Fourth-grader Esme Famularcano represented Kirtland Elementary School after claiming victory in her grade, while Lauren Moore advanced as the fifth-grade champion. Sixth-grader Bobby Ruggeri, seventh-grader Henriette Famularcano and eighth-grader Calvin MacGillis each secured their positions by winning at their grade levels.

After multiple rounds of challenging words, Esme Famularcano emerged as the district champion and advanced to the Lake County Spelling Bee on February 12, competing against top spellers from other school districts throughout the county. She earned an impressive fifth-place finish among the county's top spellers.

This competition is part of the Scripps National Spelling Bee program, which has been connecting students across the country since its establishment in 1925.

KIRTLAND ELEMENTARY GOES FOR GOLD AT WINTER CELEBRATION OF LEARNING

Kirtland Elementary School (KES) brought the spirit of the Olympics to life on February 19 with its Winter Celebration of Learning, an evening event that invited families to explore classrooms and celebrate student achievement.

The celebration featured two sessions to accommodate all grade levels. Students in grades three through five welcomed families first, followed by preschool through second grade. When families were not visiting their students' classrooms, they were encouraged to head to the KES gymnasium from the Olympic Learning Hub, which featured a refreshment stand, photo booth, music and exploration activities.

Additional attractions rounded out the evening's Olympic theme. Families could test their knowledge at Olympic Trivia with Mr. Bob Lasecki in the atrium, browse the KES Art Show as part of the Gold Medal Artist Exhibit, and shop at a one-night-only Scholastic Book Fair brought in by the Kirtland PTA to support student reading.

The Olympic theme extended throughout KES, with classroom doors decorated to represent different countries from around the world, adding a festive and educational element to the experience.

"Thank you to all the families who participated in our Celebration of Learning," said KES Principal Missy Godina. "A big thanks to Leslie Held and Michelle Meleski who spearheaded the event alongside the literacy committee. It was a huge success. We appreciate all the donations and the support setting up for the event. The classroom doors looked phenomenal and truly represented each country."

Events like the Winter Celebration of Learning reflect the strong partnership between Kirtland Local Schools and the families it serves, bringing everyone together to honor student growth and achievement.

WINTER SPORTS SHORTS

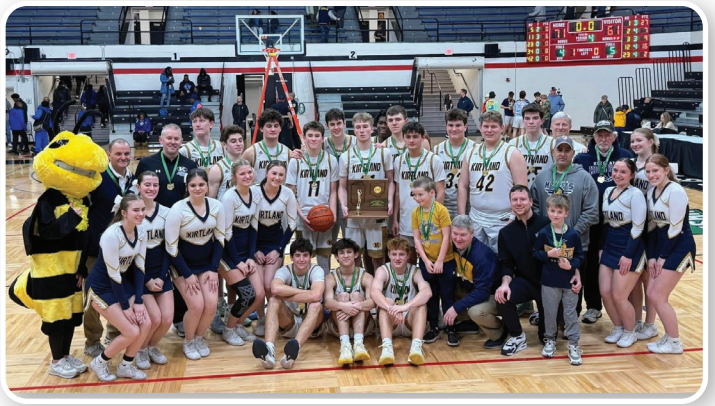
The winter sports season is nearly complete, but the Kirtland Hornets' boys' basketball team, indoor track team, and wrestling team are still competing.

Here's a recap of how the Hornets fared this winter:

BOYS BASKETBALL

The Hornets, fresh off a run to the Final Four last season, finished the 2025-26 regular season with a 19-3 record overall and shared the Chagrin Valley Conference Valley Division title with a 9-1 record.

Kirtland opened the postseason with wins over Bard Early College and St. Thomas Aquinas, and will play Oberlin in a district championship game on March 7.



Head Coach Shawn McGregor was a CVC Valley Division Coach of the Year, and senior Lucas Renfro was named the Valley Division MVP, and was named first-team all-conference. Senior Ben DiFranco joined Renfro on the first team, and senior Mike Dumstorff and junior Sammy Ridgeway were second-team selections.

GIRLS BASKETBALL

Kirtland's girls' basketball team finished head coach Paul Force's first season guiding the Hornets with a 10-14 record overall and a 2-8 mark in conference play.

The Hornets secured a postseason victory by defeating Oberlin in a sectional semifinal, then closed their season with a loss in the sectional championship game.

Dumstorff set a couple of school records from behind the 3-point line on her way to earning first-team all-conference honors. She set the school record for 3-pointers made in a single game, and 3-pointers made in a season (74).

Sophomore Kylie Sayle and freshman Gabby D'Amato were named honorable mention all-conference.

GYMNASTICS

Senior Reese Kost closed out her high school gymnastics career at the district meet, where she placed 22nd in the all-around with a score of 33.425. She finished 36th in the bars (7.850), 49th on the beam (8.175), 34th on the floor (8.700), and 26th on the vault (8.700).

Kost qualified for the state tournament during her junior season.

SWIMMING & DIVING

Sophomore Keegan Loschert swam her way to the district championships, and also earned a pair of all-conference awards.

Loschert was named second-team All-CVC in both the 200 individual medley and the 100 breaststroke.

INDOOR TRACK

Kirtland's indoor track team will close its season on Saturday, March 7, at the indoor state track meet at SPIRE.

Senior Jay Ware qualified in the high jump while senior Izzie Copeland punched her ticket to the state meet in the 1600, and freshman Nadija Mrva qualified in the 3200.

Copeland and Mrva will also team up with senior Megan Urbanick, junior Danika Schaum, and sophomore Kylie Sayle to compete in the 4x400 and 4x800-meter relays.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

April 21	Spring Choir Concert (Grades 5-7)
April 22	Spring Choir Concert (Grade 8-12)
April 27	Regular Board of Education Meeting
May 5	Band Concert (Grade 5)
May 8	No School
May 8	Prom
May 18	Regular Board of Education Meeting
May 24	Graduation
May 25	Memorial Day – No School
May 28	Last Day of School

*****ECRWSSEDDM*****
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